



HOMELAND SECURITY COMMITTEE

Statement of Chairman Michael McCaul (R-TX) Full Committee

"Preparedness, Response and Rebuilding: Lessons from the 2017 Disasters"

March 15, 2018

Remarks as Prepared

This morning our Committee has gathered to review our ability to prepare, respond, and rebuild, in the wake of the natural disasters of 2017.

Before we begin, I would like to extend my heartfelt condolences to the victims of the recent bombings in my home city of Austin.

These heinous attacks need to stop. No one should ever be afraid to open their front door and pick up a package.

We will find out who is responsible for these murders and make sure they are brought to justice.

While the American people are constant targets of foreign and domestic terrorists, cybercriminals, gangs like MS-13, and human traffickers, today's hearing will focus on the dangers of natural disasters.

In 2017 there were 65 major disasters declared. They included hurricanes that hit my home state of Texas, Florida, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico. We also saw dozens of wildfires burn through thousands of acres and destroy everything in their path.

After Hurricane Harvey hit Texas, I personally toured the devastated communities in my district, as well as the city of Houston.

Days of punishing rain, rising rivers, and overflowing bayous wreaked havoc on much of the state. The destruction was horrifying. Roads were flooded and many homes were obliterated. Sadly, many people lost their lives.

But I also witnessed the strength of the Texas spirit. Many volunteers hopped into their boats to rescue people who were stranded on their roof or trapped in a vehicle.

Others waded out into murky waters filled with snakes and fire ants to save their loved ones or even a complete stranger.

Texans helping Texans rose to the challenge and assisted one another during a very tough time.

Strong coordination on the local, state, and federal levels with FEMA and the Army Corps of Engineers played a key role as well. This kind of teamwork was also evident in Florida after Hurricane Irma.

Unfortunately, Hurricane Maria completely shattered Puerto Rico. Even today much of the island is still struggling to recover.

It's important that we learn from the lessons of each of these storms so we are better prepared in the future.

Natural disasters bring a lot of harm, but they also provide an opportunity to put our differences aside and work together.

I am proud to say that both parties came together to pass supplemental relief packages that provide billions of dollars to the Disaster Relief Fund and the National Flood Insurance Program.

It is always our goal to make sure FEMA has the resources and capabilities it needs before it is called into action.

The first ever, comprehensive reauthorization of DHS that passed the House in July strengthens our first responders and front-line defenders.

I am encouraged that the Senate has finally started to take action on this and I am hopeful a reauthorization of DHS will be sent to the President soon.

I'd like to personally thank each of today's witnesses for being with us this morning. Shortly after Hurricane Harvey, I met with Administrator Long at FEMA's headquarters to receive a briefing during the initial recovery.

While there I could see firsthand, the dedication and professionalism of the men and women who spring into action during a natural disaster.

I am very grateful for their service and for the efforts of all of our partners at the federal, state, and local level.

I now recognize Ranking Member Thompson for an opening statement.

###